

# Worksession

<b>Agenda Item #</b>	10
<b>Meeting Date</b>	9 May 2005
<b>Prepared By</b>	Sara Anne Daines HCD Director
<b>Approved By</b>	Barbara Matthews City Manager

<b>Discussion Item</b>	Arts and Humanities Commission - Takoma Park Poet Laureate Program
<b>Background</b>	<p>The Council will be asked to consider a proposal to establish a city-sponsored poet laureate program. The program would provide for the selection of a local poet who would serve for a period of two (2) years. Additional information is included in the accompanying proposal.</p> <p>The proposal will be presented by representatives of the Arts and Humanities Commission (AHC).</p>
<b>Policy</b>	<p>“To expand public awareness of, involvement in, and access to the arts and arts opportunities and to create an environment which promotes interaction, dialogue, discussion and lasting relationships between artists and the public.”</p> <p>Ordinance 2003-01 Establishing the Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission</p>
<b>Fiscal Impact</b>	<p>The proposal provides for a \$1,000 stipend for the selected poet. An additional \$500 would be budgeted to cover the costs of programs, such as readings, workshops, mailings, or receptions. If the proposal is approved by the Council, the AHC anticipates being able to proceed with the selection of the poet laureate yet this fiscal year. There are sufficient funds remaining in the Commission’s FY05 budget to cover the cost of the proposed stipend.</p> <p>A total of \$5,000 is included in the proposed FY06 budget for the Arts and Humanities Commission.</p>
<b>Attachments</b>	Takoma Park Poet Laureate Proposal
<b>Recommendation</b>	To provide input on the proposed Poet Laureate proposal
<b>Special Consideration</b>	Resolution establishing the Takoma Park Poet Laureate program is tentatively scheduled for May 23, 2005

**Arts and Humanities Commission  
Takoma Park Poet Laureate Proposal  
May 2005**

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The Arts and Humanities Commission recommends that the City Council establish a Takoma Park Poet Laureate Program. The purpose of the poet laureate is to provide literary leadership in the community.

**History and Goals**

More than thirty-five states have poet laureates, as do myriad county and municipal governments. The Library of Congress also appoints a U.S. poet laureate. A poet laureate is a resident who has demonstrated exceptional ability and a high level of achievement in the art of poetry. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, for example, was the first poet laureate of San Francisco, serving for two years, and Dolores Kendrick is currently poet laureate of the District of Columbia.

Terms for poet laureates across the country vary, ranging from one year to lifetime appointments, but most are two or more years. (The British poet laureate, which dates back to the 1600s, is a royal office that is awarded for life.) Their responsibilities are largely self-defined based on the special teaching, publishing, performance, organizational, or other interests of the recipient.

The goals of the Takoma Park program are to honor achievement by a Takoma Park poet and, in doing so, to stimulate interest in poetry among residents of the city. A poet laureate is a symbol of the important role the arts play in our civic life and creative expression. When a city honors a poet, it creates: a model for youth, encouraging residents young and old to strive for greater expressive abilities; a literary ambassador to the community; and a means to encourage wider appreciation of poetry and literature. The presence of a poet laureate can be a source of pride for a community about the priorities it sets for its citizens, and a source of public pleasure. It can enhance certain public events, such as the dedication of a new Municipal Center. As Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Toronto Poet Laureate, said in a 2004 address, "A city is not happy owing just to prosperity or economic opportunity. It is happy in the hope and business of human and meaningful things."

Takoma Park already has a tradition of supporting poetry, through the annual Favorite Poem Evening sponsored by the library. The city has been well known as a haven for creative individuals throughout the decades, and the poet laureate will help add to the sense that it continues to be a special place, a distinctive, arts-friendly community. The proposed cultural plan for the city of Takoma Park identified a need for cultural education and programs that "foster an atmosphere/environment for children and adults to experience the arts and humanities...." As an individual who will develop and promote programs that celebrate the arts – in particular poetry - the poet laureate will support this vision of "a community of culturally aware residents."

## **Term**

Beginning in the summer of 2005, a poet laureate shall be selected to serve a two-year term, with the possibility to be invited back to serve a second term.

## **Selection Criteria**

The poet laureate shall be:

- A Takoma Park resident;
- A published poet who demonstrates achievement over an extended time period;
- An active practitioner;
- A person who is recognized by the literary community (either through awards, public notice, or letters attesting to his/her standing); and
- A person who has been engaged in teaching or public speaking, or who demonstrates other evidence of community engagement

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

The poet laureate shall present an inaugural public reading at the Community Center or Library of his/her own work, including one poem celebrating the community and its history;

The poet laureate shall complete one public project of his/her own choosing that promotes poetry and writing; this will be worked out with the selection committee within three months of selection;

The poet laureate is encouraged to make other appearances at public service venues, such as schools or senior citizens homes. These activities support the goal of encouraging public education and lifelong learning in and through the arts and humanities.

## **Budget**

The poet laureate shall receive a \$1,000 stipend for two years' service plus a certificate attesting to his/her service;

An additional \$500 will be budgeted to cover the costs of programs, such as readings, school workshops, mailings, or receptions

## **Selection Process**

A standing committee of the Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission will send out a call for nominations to the community at large. Nominations or self-nominations must submit a cover letter, a curriculum vitae/resume including a list of publications, and three samples of poetry. Selected candidates will be interviewed by the selection committee.

The standing committee will create a seven-member selection committee comprised of: two members of the commission (presumably the standing committee); a representative from the Takoma Park Library; a representative from an area college or university (i.e. Montgomery College, Columbia Union); a published poet; a representative, either teacher or student, from a Takoma Park public school; and one interested citizen. Members of the selection committee may also nominate prospective candidates.

The selection committee shall by a date established beforehand make its choice, and forward it to the Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission for approval. The commission will then ask the City Council to vote on the appointment.

The same process will be used to determine whether to renew the poet laureate's appointment after two years or whether to choose a new poet laureate. The poet laureate's level of engagement with the community, continued residency, and continued achievement will be considered along with the other criteria.